

## **Victimisation by means of digital technology: New challenges for the treatment of victims**

**Innocence in Danger** is an international movement against child sexual abuse with a special focus on distribution of child abusive images via internet and the risk digital media pose to children and adolescents today.

Founded 1999 by Homayra Sellier in Paris, Innocence in Danger today has offices in France, Switzerland, the United States, Morocco, Columbia and Germany. The German chapter took up its work in 2003. From 2004 until 2007 Innocence Germany conducted a study on how child and adolescent victims of child-pornographic-exploitation are being cared for in Germany. In 2005 Innocence in Danger Germany together with another NGO founded a nationwide infoline against child sexual abuse in Germany.

Right now we are in the last year of running a prevention model scheme on internet with adolescents concerning internet safety which we will hopefully turn into a nationwide peer to peer education program beginning of next year.

Networking and raising public awareness is one of the main aims of Innocence in Danger Germany.

- Innocence in Danger Germany is a member of eNACSO (European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online thematic network), author of the brochure “The right click”.
- Innocence in Danger Germany is also part of an EU research, funded by Safer Internet called ROBERT (**R**isk taking **O**nline **B**ehaviour **E**mpowerment through **R**esearch and **T**raining) along with the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Save the Children Denmark and Italy, Stellit International, Edinburgh University, Linköping University and Tartu University. Aim of this research is to better understand victimization as well as delinquent behaviour in order to enhance prevention programs as well as intervention programs.
- In Germany we are part of the alliance “White IT” run by the minister of interior of Lower Saxony as well as
- the “BundLänder AG” – a monitoring group – run by the federal ministry of family affairs.

## **When talking about online victims it is necessary to distinguish between different groups:**

1. Victims who have been or who are being abused within their social surroundings and whose abusive images are being distributed by means of digital media.
2. Victims who are groomed online and are later on abused offline.
3. Victims who are groomed online and abused online.

## **Number of abusive images around:**

It is very difficult to get hard figures of abusive images spread. But to give you an idea here are figures of the Child Victim Identification Program run by NCMEC<sup>1</sup>: 1998 the Child Victim Identification Program accounted for 100.000 child sexual abusive images. By the beginning of 2009 this number had risen up to 23 Million images! As of last year ChildBase<sup>2</sup> held 807,525 unique images.

We have to take into consideration that "The demographics of child sexual abuse images remain an incomplete science since the majority of confirmed images are of prepubescent children. Those boys and girls with incomplete sexual maturation but who have started pubertal development constitute a potential significant number of victims who are not accounted for in this aspect of child abuse surveillance. The reasons for this discrepancy rest upon the fact that the majority of analysts who monitor images on the Internet feel most comfortable in determining that an image is consistent with a child, when there is no evidence of sexual maturation at all" (Cooper, 2009).

This is important as our estimates of the number of images is at best a very conservative guess, and a guess which is likely to exclude anyone showing any sexual maturation.

## **German Study by Innocence in Danger Germany**

From 2004 until 2007 we conducted an empirical study concerning the care and treatment of victims of child pornographic exploitation (CPE) in Germany<sup>3</sup>. This was done by contacting all specialized institutions nationwide dealing with sexually abused children and distributing questionnaires as well as conducting in depth interviews. 245 cases of child pornographic exploitation (197 girls, 48 boys – aged between 6 to 14) as well as 280 suspected cases of child pornographic exploitation were identified for the reporting period from 2000 until 2005. 84% of all professionals stated however, that they had not been confronted with any such cases.

**Counsellors stated that** "guilt" as well as "fear of the abuser" made it difficult to disclose picture taking. They also assumed that maybe they did not interpret suggestions the victim might have made during counselling/therapy rightly.

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<sup>1</sup> Child Victim Identification Program (1998 run by Copine Project, since 2000 run by NCMEC (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)

<sup>2</sup> Ceop (Child Exploitation Online Protection Unit) – personal information by Terry Jones

<sup>3</sup> in print „Journal of Sexual Aggression“

**Types of abusive images** seen most by counsellors/therapists included sexual acts between child/adolescent and adults, touching of genitals, vaginal abuse, oral abuse, posing for nude pictures and photographing/filming of genitals.

**Distribution via internet** was something counsellors and therapists were very insecure about. But we have to take into consideration that times have changed since 2005!

### **Perpetrators**

Most of the perpetrators were the “father” or a “father figure” or had a close relationship to the family as a family friend.

**Perpetrators used strategies** of “showing ‘emotional affection’ as well as preferring the child over another;” “pretending wrong sexual behaviour to be normal.” They made presents and paid money” and/or threatened the child. *This seemed to allow for the assumption that child pornographic exploitation takes place within close (off-line) surroundings of the victims.*

**Counsellors and Therapists mostly offered** therapy and counselling for victims and/or aided through the process of a trial and/or offered pedagogic group work. *Striking was the fact that diagnostic assessment was applied regularly in cases!*

Counsellors and therapists reported that **cases involving child abusive images were more complex** than offline abuse, more demanding and raised many questions about professional involvement.

### **What is special about treating victims of CPE?**

Counsellors and therapists stated as well that cases involving abusive images were cognitively as well as emotionally more challenging for them. They also thought however, that for victims issues regarding the abuse rather than the filming or picture taking were of more relevance.

Counsellors and therapists usually avoided confronting the victims with the possibility of abusive images. They believed such a confrontation could retraumatize the child and it would contradict the position of letting the victim set the pace as to what to disclose at which point in time. Some specialized counselling centres also believed that their specialization considering sexual abuse would be enough to encourage disclosure – also disclosure of CPE.

**The fact that abusive images would stay permanently once out in the World Wide Web** lead to feelings of discomposure and powerlessness for counsellors/therapists. They assumed that victims would be just as challenged by it as soon as they would cognitively grasp the implication of permanence within the World Wide Web. In order to cope with “permanence” some professionals would use trauma-therapeutic measures. Others believed coping as in healing not to be possible considering permanence.

**Child Pornographic Exploitation took place within close familial and social surroundings of the child.** Structures of organized crime (mafia) or internationally operating rings were rarely ever mentioned. It seems that victims of such organized

crime hardly ever find any help within the German counselling/therapy services.

### **Victims:**

When talking about abusive images we need to be clear what we are talking about: Sexual abuse of children and adolescents. We are talking about vaginal and anal penetration, oral abuse, touching, making children and adolescents do things they DO NOT want to do. And we need to be very much aware that abusive images make the utter shame, hurt and devastation of children and adolescents public.

Dr. Sharon Cooper<sup>4</sup>: “The distribution of child sex abuse images means there can be one victim and many offenders. The fact that these images are spread and downloaded by others leads to heightened symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, depression and or anxiety, plus a diagnosis so far not commonly seen in child sex abuse cases – paranoia.”

But actually we do believe that we need to find a better name for it. Because these victims have every reason to be afraid that others see their images, maybe people in their close surroundings.

And we need to understand that these images are around FOR EVER. As we all know, once an image is online it will most probably always be online. Meaning that victims have to find new ways of coping and we need to help them in doing so and what is needed to foster their resilience.

### **Online Grooming and Self Generated Images**

During the past years problems of “online grooming” as well as “self generated images” have also finally come to the attention of counsellors and therapists working with sexually abused children and adolescents. Offenders target children and adolescents online, groom them online which leads to so called “self generated” sexualized images of the victim as well as contact offences. Furthermore adolescents are also using digital media in order to present themselves in problematic sexualized ways or themselves grooming others into generating sexualized images or contact offences.

Image taking and the distribution of images change everything for victims.

- Does it seem I complied (offline abuse images distributed online).
- I am responsible, nobody will believe I was somehow forced or manipulated into taking these images (online grooming leading to self-generated images).
- Who will see these images? What will friends and family think?
- Who are the perpetrators looking at the images?
- People will look at these images in order to get sexually aroused and masturbate.
- I was abused once but it continues on endlessly.
- ...<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> personal note

<sup>5</sup> Article by a therapist dealing with case descriptions dealing concerning these questions will be published in the „Journal of Sexual Aggression“

**Therapy and counselling** have to deal with the fact that child abusive images are physical proof of the horror children and adolescents had to endure. Regarding trauma therapy this physical evidence might question its efficiency or traditional appliance maybe more than we are willing to admit. This in turn means we have to find new ways of caring for these victims, learn with them what is needed and come up with maybe even unorthodox methods in reaching out to them.

## **What is needed?**

### **1. Identifying all above mentioned types of online victims and providing them with adequate care.**

In order to do that we need to train counsellors and therapists maybe even by generating a European or International curriculum which then will be applied in the respective countries.

### **2. Online counselling – as a first step to getting help is also needed.**

A study conducted by Catarina Katzer, University of Cologne showed that only 8% of those adolescents who have been sexually harassed online will turn to an adult for help. Online counselling will make this step much easier and might then lead them into “face to face” sessions. The German infoline N.I.N.A. will offer online counselling to online victims as of fall this year – funded by the World Childhood Foundation. Here it is detrimental to work with those social networks who clearly target children and adolescents as members.

### **3. Treatment programs for delinquents**

It is necessary to provide adequate treatment programs for delinquents, which will also address online grooming and online abuse of children. By doing so we will also learn more about their behaviour which in turn can be put to use for prevention as well as intervention programs for victims.

### **4. Prevention**

We need adequate programs to reach out to children, adolescents, caretakers and educators with prevention programs in order to make them understand risks as well as safety measures to be taken.

### **5. Research**

We need to focus research on online grooming leading to online or offline abuse as well as concerning the distribution of images. Only by doing so we will be able to understand mechanisms which in turn will be put to use for treatment of victims, treatment of delinquents and prevention programs. ROBERT is setting out to do a first step in exactly that direction.

**Julia von Weiler**

Psychologist

CEO

Innocence in Danger e.V. Germany

Mail: [info@innocenceindanger.de](mailto:info@innocenceindanger.de)